

Sri Lanka: Alongside the A9 highway to war-torn Jaffna

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The following photo essay provides a glimpse of the plight facing war refugees along the A9 highway and in Jaffna after the official end of the Sri Lankan government's communal war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in May 2009.

The images were taken by photojournalist Shantanu Kumarasamy during a recent journey along the A9 highway, which connects the rest of the island with the Jaffna Peninsula. The photographs record the landscape from Omantai, in the Vanni, to Chunnakam, a suburban settlement in Jaffna.

Following the last phase of the war, over 284,000 people from the Vanni who survived the bloody front-line conflict were incarcerated in military-run camps, such as the infamous Menik Farm. Over 25,000 people remain incarcerated in Manik Farm while the remainder have been "resettled" to their towns and villages, or with relatives.

Due to the heavy fighting, shelling and aerial bombardment, few permanent structures exist in the so-called "resettled areas" of Kilinochchi, Mannar and Mullaitivu districts. Those who were "resettled" were given plastic sheeting for housing, along with a few other household items, and promised 25,000 rupees (\$US225)—5,000 rupees of this in cash and the rest to be deposited in a bank account.

Another 60,000 people in Sri Lanka's North and East, some of them living in temporary shelters since the early 1980s, remain "displaced" because their homes and businesses were taken over by the military to create official and unofficial High Security Zones.

Eighteen months after the end of the war, there are

about 40,000 army officers and soldiers in the Jaffna Peninsula, a ratio of approximately 1:11 of military personnel to civilians. In the Vanni region, the ratio is about 1: 4. According to some estimates, almost 147,000 civilians are missing from the Vanni.

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